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# "Teaching Postfeminism and Media Culture" Editor's Notes and Introduction

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## **Teaching Postfeminism and Media Culture Editor's Notes and Introduction**

### **Lauren Weinzimmer**

Postfeminism, whether understood as an ideology, a discourse, or what some scholars have called a "sensibility," rests on the assumption that the work of feminism is done and over (Gill 2007, 147). Although there is a great deal of evidence contravening postfeminism's central assumption that gender equality has been achieved and feminism is no longer needed, postfeminist, and other post- discourses continue to hold sway in how we look at, engage with, and interpret media culture (Gill 2007, McRobbie 2009). The current cultural moment is markedly different from that under which theories of postfeminism have been previously imagined, as early as the 1990's and in texts such as *Interrogating Postfeminism* (Tasker and Negra 2007) and *Enlightened Sexism* (Douglas 2010). Events such as the 2008 recession (Tasker and Negra 2014), the introduction of discourses of 4th wave feminism (cited in Gill 2016), and the misogyny rampant in the most recent election cycle all call the validity of postfeminist rhetoric into question. As such, this issue of *Teaching Media Quarterly* finds new and innovative ways to keep discussions around postfeminism in the undergraduate classroom.

Today, past theorization(s) of postfeminism are being re-imagined. In addition, the texts that instructors have long used to illustrate postfeminist discourses, such as *Ally McBeal*, *Sex and the City*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are no longer familiar to students. Thus, instructors must adjust our approach to teaching this framework. Avoiding these conversations would undercut what Rosalind Gill claims is "the continued relevance of postfeminism" in media studies classrooms and would over-simplify the complicated terrain of feminism, and postfeminism, in contemporary media culture and in the relevant context of neoliberalism (2016, 612). The authors in this issue address postfeminism in an intersectional manner, looking at how it can be engaged in conversations with other feminist discourses, alongside post-race discourses, and through digital and social media platforms.

**Kristen Hoffmann-Longtin** and **Sarah Bonewits Feldner** help their students to explore media representations of third wave feminism and postfeminism, ultimately asking complex questions about the importance of language and definitions to movements for gender justice. Using the films *Ten Things I Hate About You* (1999) and *Legally Blonde* (2001) as a starting point, students engage through structured close viewing and guided small and large group discussion to try to identify and analyze the mix of feminist and postfeminist messages in the texts. Finally they are asked to bring more contemporary examples from their own mediaspheres into the discussion, or into an optional writing assignment. The lesson demonstrates the ways in which feminist ideologies are shaped by media, and leads students to ultimately ask difficult questions about the impact of media on their own identities and their perspectives on movements for gender justice.

In "A Feminist Pedagogical Approach to Disrupting Students' Digital Self-Representational Strategies," **Dara Persis Murray** offers a lesson that brings critical theories of the gaze, postfeminism, and branding (among others) to practices of gendered self-construction in social media culture. The lesson asks students to critically analyze the manner in which they self-police their appearances in their everyday digital practices. More specifically, students take a "selfie," and then edit the image exactly as they would were they going to post it to social media. Students

then write a 400-word reflection essay on their process and practices of self-representation. Finally, they are invited (but not required) to share their images with the class for a larger discussion. In Murray's timeline, the lesson takes place in week 8 of a course on gender and advertising, and draws upon course readings completed prior. However, instructors could easily choose one or two of the readings, or use other readings on gender, self-representation, and postfeminism, to adapt the lesson to a shorter timeframe.

**Sarah Kornfield** uses the popular film *The Hunger Games* to help students understand that postfeminism is a current force in our culture and intrinsically connected to other post-ideologies. The lesson plan "*The Hunger Games: Understanding Postfeminist and Postracial Ideologies*" is designed for one class period and is fully discussion based. Through guided small group discussions of the film, specific clips, and class readings students develop an understandings of how postfeminism and postracism intersect in this contemporary franchise. As Kornfield explains, through this discussion class students learn to see postfeminist and postracial ideologies inside and outside of the classroom.

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